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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: CANDIDATES AND COALITIONS FOR  
KURDISTAN REGION PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1170

This is an Erbil Regional reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In the 2005 KRG parliamentary elections, the KDP/PUK coalition sailed to an easy majority and effectively controls 80 of 111 seats today. This year, new opposition groups provide secular and Islamic alternatives for protest votes. However, the KDP/PUK is using the power of the incumbency -- and then some -- to get the vote out.  
END SUMMARY.

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42 Entities Coalesce into 20 Lists and Five Coalitions  
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¶2. (U) There are currently 20 stand-alone entities (aka lists) and five coalitions that have coalesced from the original 42 registered political entities. Seven lists have dropped out since registration: the Kurdistan Conservative Democratic Party, the Christian Fraternity Gathering, the Independent Toilers Party, the Bet Nahrain Democrat Party (Chaldean), Shant Murad Muradian (Armenian), the White Independent List and the Patriotic Democratic List (PDL) Party. Some of the drop-outs were due to double registration (the groups associated with the now-split Kurdistan Toilers party both registered two names). A representative of the Bet Nahrain (Chaldean) party informed the press that with four Chaldean parties competing for five seats that it did not make sense to have another. According to press reports, the White Independent List head said that he dropped out because there were other credible opposition lists.

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The Party Lists  
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¶3. (U) The 20 stand-alone entities include one Chaldean-Syriac Assyrian list, four Turcomen parties and a single Armenian candidate. These minority lists will be competing for the seats set aside for Christians, Armenians and Turcomen.

¶4. (U) The most prominent opposition list is the Change List, established by former PUK Deputy Secretary Nawshirwan Mustafa. The Change list includes three candidates with name recognition: Ms. Kwestan Mohammed Abdullah, the former head of the PUK "Green Bloc" in the Parliament; IKP member Osman Aula Qadir, Kwestan's predecessor as head of the "Green Bloc"; and Mohamed Tawfiq Rahim, a former PUK Politburo member.

¶5. (SBU) The Hewa list is believed to have members who are sympathetic to the PKK, according to the Turkish Consul in Mosul. RRT contacts have confirmed that Hewa is actually a subgroup of the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PCDK) which has registered under another name because of the ban on PCDK participation. The PCDK political party was outlawed by a memorandum of understanding between the GOI and Turkey, and the KRG has signed this memorandum as well. The registered

head of the Hewa party is Najiba Omer. This week, however, the Hewa party was also banned by IHEC Baghdad officials. The GOI Minister of State for National Security wrote a letter to IHEC to substantiate the ban. The Hewa party has countered with an official complaint made to the newly-formed special court for elections in Kurdistan that will adjudicate complaints.

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The Coalitions  
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¶6. (U) The five coalitions represent:

-- The Islamic groups: The Service and Reform List comprise the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIK), the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), the Social Democratic Party of Kurdistan and Future (which is the Qadir Aziz wing of the Kurdistan Toilers party.) In 2005 the KIU was a member of the KDP/PUK coalition; the KIK ran independently.

-- The Autonomy list of Chaldean Syriac Assyrians -- which  
Q-- The Autonomy list of Chaldean Syriac Assyrians -- which includes the Chaldean Assyrian Democratic list and the Assyrian National Party.

-- Mini-parties: The Freedom and Social Justice coalition includes the Kurdistan Toilers Party (the break-away wing, considered to be aligned to the KDP), the Democratic Movement for the People of Kurdistan, the Communist Party of Kurdistan Iraq, the Democratic Movement of Kurdistan, and the Kurdistan Independent Labor Party.

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-- The Governing Coalition: The simply named "Kurdistan List" comprising the PUK and the KDP.

-- The Chaldean United list: Includes the Chaldean Democratic Union Party and the Chaldean National Council.

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What is New in 2009?  
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¶7. (SBU) In the 2005 elections, a multitude of "mini parties" also ran, as well as parties associated with religious and ethnic minorities. Some were aligned with the KDP/PUK coalition; others ran for the seats designated for minorities. Those that ran as part of the coalition were given one or two seats by the ruling coalition. What is distinctive about this year's race is that the KDP/PUK coalition does not include any of these parties, and therefore all of the coalition seats will be dedicated solely to the PUK and KDP. The mini-parties will have a much harder time under these circumstances (although most of these were considered to be KDP or PUK "proxy parties" to begin with).

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Toilers Toil On In a Bitter Dispute Over Who Owns the Name  
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¶8. (SBU) The Toilers mini-party has been split, with one group holding on to the name, while the other group, which includes the Secretary General Qadir Aziz, took the membership base. According to IHEC regulations, when a party divides, the group that includes the party leader should be able to retain the original name. In the case of the Toilers, the KRG and KR Ministry of Interior intervened, and decided that the spin-off group would be permitted to retain the party's name. This oddity is most likely because of KDP pressure to split the party in an effort to subvert the Toilers' efforts to join the KIU/KIK coalition.

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The Presidential Parties  
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¶9. (U) There are five candidates registered in the KRG Presidential Race: Dr. Kamal Mamand Rasul Mirawdaly (a Kurdish author, from the Raniyah district in Sulaimaniyah); Halo Ibrahim Ahmed Fatah (brother of Hero Jalal Talabani); Masood Mustafa Barzany (current Kurdistan President); Hussein Garmiyani; Ahmed Muhamed Rasul Nabi (a businessman in Erbil, colloquially called Safeen Sheikh Muhammed). A sixth candidate, Ahmed Kurda, withdrew his candidacy on May 27. Another candidate, university professor Kamal Saeed Qader, a university professor, was disqualified for not having legal residency in the Kurdistan Region.

¶10. (SBU) Although the campaign season has not officially started, writer and educator Dr. Kamal Mirawdaly told RRT staff that the two-party, two-family system in the KRG had created a stranglehold on the people, and has caused them to regress into a tribal mentality. He hopes to counteract this trend by passing the KRG constitution in his first three months as President, and creating a stronger parliament with real legislative powers. Businessman Safeen Sheikh Muhammed, reportedly an independent candidate not affiliated with any political entity, stated: "We are a group of businessmen in Kurdistan. I believe in running for the post of Kurdistan Region President as an independent candidate."

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Comment  
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¶11. (SBU) In the 2005 elections the KDP/PUK sailed to an easy majority with 80 seats in the 111-seat body (the "minority quotas" are nominally independent, but in reality vote with the coalition.) Due to dissatisfaction with the KDP/PUK, this year we expect that opposition lists, coalitions and mini-parties may pick up as many as 30 seats. In 2005, the Islamic parties were the only alternative to the QIn 2005, the Islamic parties were the only alternative to the KDP/PUK. The appearance of a secular alternative may well draw away votes to the Change party from the Islamic parties -- whether this will be zero-sum or whether the Change group will tap into a new well of discontented voters remains to be seen.

¶12. (SBU) Meanwhile, reports from the independent media indicate that the PUK is pulling out all the stops to counteract popular support for the Change list through the power of patronage and the party's dominance over local government in PUK-controlled Sulaimaniyah. These reports are substantiated by anecdotal reports from RRT contacts in Sulaimaniyah. In KDP territory, the government is also using

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the power of the incumbency (a contact reported that a visit to the Ministry of the Interior found MoI employees busily organizing KDP election material in the building.)

¶13. (SBU) RRT Team Leader has started a series of press/TV interviews to emphasize the importance of meeting internationally-recognized standards for the upcoming elections, in particular, the ability of candidates and voters to vote their conscience and campaign free from intimidation and harassment.  
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